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Self-isolation changes for close contacts and unvaccinated travelers; PEI Vax Pass to be discontinued; booster doses now available for those 12 to 17 years of age

Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Heather Morrison, has announced new changes to isolation requirements and the discontinuation of the PEI Vax Pass.

“These changes are not a signal that COVID-19 is behind us, rather that we are taking steps to allow us to live sustainably with the virus. We will continue to be cautious and maintain a state of readiness as we continue to manage our way through this pandemic and live more normally with COVID-19,” said Dr. Morrison.

Changes to isolation requirements for close contacts will come into effect at 8:00 am on Thursday, February 24;

- **There will be two types of close contacts:**

- Household close contacts
- Non-household close contacts

- **A household close contact** is someone who meets the definition of a close contact (face to face, unmasked, contact with a positive case for at least 15 minutes) and someone who spent time in the home of someone with COVID-19 while the person was infectious.

- Household close contacts, regardless of vaccination status, are required to isolate for 96 hours following their last contact with the positive case and get tested at a Health PEI clinic on day four.
- They can exit isolation with a negative test, provided they do not have symptoms.
- They should not visit high risk settings (child care facilities, long term care homes, community care homes, group homes, and other congregate living settings) for 10 days following exposure to the positive case.
- Staff members from high risk settings who are identified as household close contacts may return to work if they wear a well-fitted mask and follow protocols.
- Children may return to child care facilities after completing the four day isolation.

- **A non-household contact** is an individual who meets the definition of close contacts (face to face, unmasked contact with a positive case for at least 15 minutes) and may include classmates, bus mates, team mates, work colleagues, or those you had lunch with.

- Non-household close contacts, regardless of vaccination status, are required to follow enhanced measures for 96 hours after their last exposure to a positive case.
- **Enhanced measures include:**
 - No isolation

- Getting tested on day four at a Health PEI testing clinic
- Wearing a well-fitting, three-layer mask when outside the home
- Work from home as much as possible
- If at work, maintain physical distancing
- If symptoms develop, get tested (do not wait for day four)
- For 10 days following their last exposure to a positive case they should not visit high risk settings
- **All close contacts** (household and non-household) will continue to be contacted directly by positive cases, with the exception of school-aged children under the age of 12 who will be contacted by schools and child care facilities.
- **Those isolating with a positive case** (for example, a parent or guardian isolating with a child who is positive) will no longer have to self-isolate as a close contact once the case is recovered.

In family situations where children and parents or guardians are testing positive at different times, which extends the period of isolation, there will also be a change. In these situations, after the first positive case in the household completes their isolation, family members who did not have symptoms or test positive may exit isolation. They will be required to test every four days until the last positive case in the household has finished their isolation. Any family members who develop symptoms should visit a Health PEI clinic to be tested immediately and isolate until they receive a negative result.

The isolation changes all refer to close contacts, there are no changes to isolation requirements for positive cases who are still required to isolate (seven days for fully vaccinated individuals and 10 days for those not fully vaccinated).

“The PEI Vax Pass Program has been effective in reducing transmission, however with Omicron, we are now seeing COVID-19 transmission occur among both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. The main difference has shown us that those who are unvaccinated have increased risk of severe illness and outcomes, including hospitalization,” said Dr. Morrison. “The Vax Pass was introduced as a time-limited additional measure and it has served its purpose well, however there are still many other layers of protection that remain in place, including masking.”

Effective Monday, February 28 at 12:01 am the PEI Vax Pass will be discontinued. Travelers entering PEI who are not fully vaccinated will no longer be required to isolate, but will still be screened and tested on entry and again on day 2 and 4 the same as all travelers.

Youth age 12 to 17 are now eligible to receive a Pfizer booster six months after their second dose. Families are encouraged to review information provided regarding what is known about booster doses in this age group, including the low risk of severe illness and the rare risk of myocarditis and pericarditis, following mRNA vaccines.

As of 8:00 am this morning, Wednesday, February 23, there are 526 new cases of COVID-19 and 143 resolved cases. These new cases are still under investigation.

There are currently 2,316 active cases of COVID-19 and there have been 12,657 cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Over the last seven days there have been an average of 244 cases per day.

Update on the locations of current outbreaks in high-risk settings:

- **Long Term Care Facilities** (two facilities with outbreaks):
 - Garden Home
 - South Shore Villa

- **Early Learning and Child Care Centres:**

- 18 centres with cases or outbreaks of COVID-19
- Nine centres open
- Two centre closed
- Seven centres operating at a modified or reduced capacity

Island schools with cases are listed on the Public Schools Branch and Commission scolaire de langue française websites.

As of Sunday, February 20, 97.1 per cent of Island residents over the age of 12 years received at least one dose of vaccine and 93.9 per cent were fully vaccinated. 69 per cent of children ages 5 to 11 had one dose of vaccine.

Anyone 12 years of age and older can get their COVID-19 vaccination – first and second dose – at a Health PEI vaccination clinic or at one of the many partner pharmacies across the province. Booster doses are also being offered at clinics and partner pharmacies to those 18 years of age and older who received their second dose five and a half months earlier. Island children 5 to 11 years of age can receive their COVID-19 vaccine at a Health PEI vaccination clinic.

Until further notice, testing at Health PEI COVID-19 testing clinics will continue to be limited to the following:

- Symptomatic individuals
- Close contacts of positive cases
- Confirmatory tests for individuals who test preliminary positive with a rapid antigen test

Individuals who do not have symptoms do not require testing (unless in one of the above categories). Individuals entering PEI will be given rapid antigen screening tests to be used on days 2 and 4 after arrival.

Individuals who are isolating and require supports are encouraged to dial 2-1-1 to be directed to nearby community support systems, or provincial government service offices. This assistance includes help with securing food, personal prescriptions, over-the-counter medications and other emergency situations. The program operates on a self-referral basis. More information is available [here](#).

As always, all Islanders are urged to get tested if they experience any symptoms of COVID-19, even after a previous negative test, and to self-isolate until the results come back.

For information on PEI's COVID-19 vaccine rollout, including vaccine facts, immunization data and booking an appointment, visit: [COVID-19 Vaccines](#). For answers to commonly asked questions about the COVID-19 vaccines, visit: [Answers to Common COVID-19 Vaccine Questions](#).

For the latest information about Prince Edward Island's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, visit: [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) in Prince Edward Island](#).

Background:

The Chief Public Health Office continues to work closely with the federal government, provincial and territorial counterparts, government departments and Health PEI to monitor the pandemic situation and prepare for all COVID-19 related impacts to the province, including health, social and economic. The public health risk of COVID-19 is continually reassessed, and Islanders will be updated as new information becomes available.

Everyone is encouraged to follow routine prevention measures:

- Get vaccinated
- Wear a properly fitted, three-layer mask in indoor public places and in outdoor public places where physical distancing from others cannot be maintained
- Keep your circle of contacts small
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue
- Stay home if you are not feeling well
- Limit touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Physical distance - stay two meters (6 feet) apart
- Don't share items like drinking glasses and water bottles
- Frequently clean surfaces like taps, doorknobs and countertops
- Visit a drop-in-clinic to be tested if you have COVID-19 symptoms

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